DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 089 SO 015 013

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TITLE The Paradigmatic Mentality: A Diagnosis.
PUB DATE Jan 83
NOTE 39p.; Paper presented at the Sociology of Education Conference (Birmingham, England, January, 1983).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; *Educational Sociology; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Intellectual Disciplines; Research Methodology; Scientific Methodology; Validity
IDENTIFIERS Knowledge; *New Sociology of Education; *Paradigm Argument; Sociologists

ABSTRACT

The major features of the paradigm argument are outlined and the disastrous effect that the paradigmatic mentality has had on the development of the new sociology of education is examined. The paradigm argument states that all knowledge is founded upon epistemological, theoretical, and political assumptions, and that, therefore, knowledge must be regarded as framed within, and relative to, a particular paradigm. What makes the new sociology of education particularly significant is its denial of the claim that sociologists can produce objective knowledge about the world. Because of this view, the discipline has split into competing approaches and divisions. It is in this context that the paradigmatic mentality, a set of attitudes to sociological work deriving from the paradigm argument, has flourished. In practice the paradigm argument encourages intolerance, divides sociological work into different paradigms, and threatens the very possibility of rational debate among representatives of the different approaches. The most common response to work in other paradigms which the argument induces is sheer neglect. Huge tracts of the sociological literature are ignored. The paradigm argument also encourages sociologists to treat their own political and theoretical assumptions as articles of faith, encouraging speculation and the neglect of systematic checking of theories and facts. If the paradigm argument were valid, we might have to live with its consequences. However, there are good reasons for thinking that it is not. A discussion of these reasons concludes the paper. (RM)

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The Paradigmatic Mentality: A Diagnosis

by

Martyn Hammersley

Paper presented at the Sociology of Education Conference (Birmingham, England, January, 1983).

SP 015-013

> The initial impression one has in reading through the literature in and about the social disciplines during the past decade or so is that of sheer chaos. Everything appears to be "up for grabs." There is little or no consensus - except by members of the same school or subschool - about what are the well-established results, the proper research procedures, the important problems, or even the most promising theoretical approaches to the study of society and politics. There are claims and counterclaims, a virtual babble of voices demanding our attention.
>
> (Bernstein, 1979, p.xii)

> There is little doubt that ... the level of theoretical sophistication has risen out of all recognition in the contemporary sociology of the last decade. But sociologists' contributions to the understanding of the world outside their study have, on the other hand, been remarkable for paucity, not to say poverty.
>
> These two situations are not just accidental or paradoxical conjunctures: they are interconnected. They reflect, that is, the socialisation of the young into a pluralistic sociological universe, in which they are systematically, as never before, exposed to several varieties of theorising. The usual claim ... is that this is a liberating experience, and it can be. But it can also be quite demoralising. The (British) sociological universe once resembled the more thinly-populated reaches of outer space, with Fabian empiricism, primitive Marxism, and structural-functionalism as the only visible heavenly bodies of theory. Today, there is a coruscating explosion of new and glittering stars: structuralism and Marxism in various forms and combinations, symbolic interactionism, and now phenomenology, especially in its ethnomethodological variants...
>
> The rate of change of theoretical fashion is now such, indeed, that whereas it took a decade or so before the demolition of functionalism ... became a ritual part of any self-respecting curriculum, theories are nowadays demolished before the ink of their manifestos has dried.
>
> (Worsley, 1974)

There is a rather old joke which tells of someone travelling abroad asking one of the locals for directions to a nearby town. The reply comes back: 'If I were going there, I wouldn't start from here'. That story / provides an analogy for the phenomenon I want to discuss: the idea that where you start from determines where you can get to.

Over thirty years ago Robert Merton berated his fellow sociologists for their premature pursuit of all-embracing, unified sociological theory. He traced the impulse to construct 'grand theory' back to the beginnings of the discipline, suggesting that it had been inherited from the system-building which dominated philosophy in the nineteenth century. He goes on to remark that:

> Within this context, almost all the pioneers in sociology tried to fashion his own system. The multiplicity of systems, each claiming to be the genuine sociology, led naturally enough to the formation of schools, each with its cluster of masters, disciples and epigoni. Sociology not only became differentiated from other disciplines, but it became internally differentiated. This differentiation, however, was not in terms of specialization, as in the sciences, but rather, as in philosophy, in terms of total systems, typically held to be mutually exclusive and largely at odds.
>
> (Merton 1967, p 46)

One of Merton's main targets in his critique of 'grand theory' was of course the work of Parsons. Twenty years later Parsons' influence is much less than it was. However, on this side of the Atlantic at least, the pursuit of 'total systems of sociological theory' is if anything even more feverish, and the fragmentation of the discipline

into different schools to which that leads has grown apace. This process has been particularly far-reaching in the sociology of education over the last decade.

For many of us in the sociology of education, and in sociology generally, the late 1960s and early 1970s were an exciting time of new horizons and possibilities. The old sociology was to be swept away and replaced by more relevant alternatives, truer to what we took to be the real nature of humanity and society. One of the guiding lights here was Dawe's (1970) discussion of order and control doctrines; the one legitimating oppression, the other inspiring liberation.

Today we are in a good position to look back and assess this 'new sociology of education', and that in one sense is what I shall be doing in this paper (for other assessments see Whitty 1974; Pring 1972; Bernbaum 1977; Karabel and Halsey 1977). However, my motive is far from being a matter of mere nostalgia or antiquarian interest. It seems to me that our work today still owes much to that 'new paradigm' of the 1970s.

It has sometimes been claimed that the new sociology of education had a demoralizing effect on teachers exposed to it (Simon 1974). In the early years this new approach was often taken to imply that any attempt on the part of teachers to shape what pupils learned represented a suppression of pupils' culturally given abilities and a denial of their rights. Later, the complaint was heard that teachers could

be forgiven for concluding from our work that their plight was hopeless since whatever they did would lead to the reproduction of capitalism, and the persistence of all those ills customarily ascribed to that type of society by sociologists. These accusations have some justification. but I believe that the new sociology of education has had an even more damaging effect on sociologists of education themselves, and that this effect is as strong today as it has ever been.

The predominant impression when I look back over the last decade or so is one of disappointment and frustration. It seems to me that we have a lot less to show for our efforts than we expected to have and indeed than we could have been justified in expecting. I am not talking here of the realm of political change, though that was certainly where many of our hopes lay. Rather, I refer to the limited contribution we have made to the understanding of educational structures and processes. We have produced plenty of theoretical ideas and many descriptive studies. But what is lacking, I suggest, is any significant cumulative development of knowledge. In particular, we have few powerful theories which would allow us to explain those aspects of educational phenomena which are of concern to us. I shall suggest that one major reason for this is that there is a central element of the new sociology of education that was, and indeed still is, antithetical to any such theoretical development.

Of course, I am not denying the benefits which the new sociology of education brought. It constituted an important

corrective to the narrow theoretical and methodological orientation of the earlier political arithmetic tradition. It opened up whole new areas of investigation and reintroduced important theoretical and methodological ideas. Nevertheless, I shall claim that one of its central elements was not only fundamentally mistaken but also seriously detrimental to the development of the discipline. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that, to some degree at least, the discipline's current political difficulties, such as right wing attacks on left wing bias, arise from it and are thus to an extent self-inflicted.

The Paradigm Argument

What I want to challenge is a set of ideas which trades under many different names. By friend and foe it is often identified with the sociology of knowledge, though it by no means exhausts nor is necessary to that discipline. I shall call it the paradigm argument. Currently, this doctrine pervades sociology; and increasingly, it seems, it is to be found in other social sciences too. Nevertheless, the effects of the acceptance of this argument are most obvious within sociology and especially within the sociology of education.

The basic premise of the paradigm argument is that all knowledge is founded upon epistemological, theoretical and political assumptions which are not open to

test, so that any knowledge must be regarded as framed within, and thus relative to, a particular paradigm. Paradigms not only indicate what is relevant and important, how to go about investigating it, and what can be taken for granted, they also lay down the criteria for determining what is true and false, real and unreal. On the basis of this idea it is argued, or implied, that sociology, and other social sciences, are necessarily composed of several incommensurable if not mutually antagonistic paradigms, perspectives or problematics founded upon competing political interests.

One rarely finds this argument clearly and fully expressed, usually it is implicit. Here, though, are two of the more explicit declarations:

> Through its focus on the link between social structural interests and the production of ideas, sociology is putting forward an overtly political view of knowledge. It would be consistent with this position to argue that 'no knowledge is neutral', and that criteria of truth, rationality and plausibility are similarly related to the social interests underlying them.
>
> (Esland, 1977:11)

> Once the social dimension of knowledge production is recognised and emphasised, the role and the extent of social practice and social interests in the very production of knowledge emerge clearly as central issues in evaluating the theoretic product (or knowledge). In evaluating theories, interpretations or knowledge, it becomes both relevant and necessary to consider which particular interests are being served in the production and promulgation of any particular theory, in what ways particular social interests are being served in any process of production, and how the various interests concerned are interrelated (and, if necessary, disguised). These considerations are not merely necessary for evaluating knowledge or theory; they are crucial:

> for, given the social dimension to the production of knowledge, the key question that we find embedded in and arising from the particular materialist framework under consideration is 'What functions do particular theoretic products serve in particular societies?' This question (and it does not preclude answers being given in terms of discovering or producing the real world) at once becomes both the focus of epistemological investigation, while also providing a means whereby we can make viable judgments of critical preference between competing interpretations, theories and research programmes.
>
> (Harris, 1979:60)

The origins of this argument are many and varied. The work of Kuhn (1962) was a major resource, not least in providing a concept of 'paradigm' which could be used in this way. Kuhn, Lakatos (1978) and Feyerbend (1975) and other contributors to post-empiricist philosophy challenged the conventional positivist accounts of science which treated the assessment of theories against facts as the feature which distinguished science from non-science (Newton-Smith, 1981; Tudor, 1982). These authors emphasize the theory-laden character of all observations and point to other criteria than empirical testing as necessary and legitimate grounds for the acceptance and rejection of theories. Also influential has been the revival or importation into Anglo-American sociology of a whole variety of alternatives to positivism - symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, structuralism and Frankfurt Marxism - all of which stress the active character of knowledge production, as against the empiricist idea that knowledge arises simply from the impression made on one's senses by the world. np. Within sociology versions of the paradigm argument were developed by a number of writers, notably Gouldner (1970). Sociology has increasingly come to be taught in higher education and in schools, in terms of multiple perspectives. Moreover, the paradigm argument has provided a powerful

rhetorical device in arguments for and against different kinds of sociological work.

The Paradigmatic Mentality and its Consequences

Central to the new sociology of education was a challenge to the claims of conventional sociologists to be engaged in the value-free pursuit of objective knowledge. That sociology had not been and could not be value-free was treated as a foregone conclusion, on the basis of arguments such as those of Gouldner (1962). But what made the new sociology of education particularly significant was its denial of the claim that sociologists (or indeed anyone else) can produce objective knowledge about the world.[1]

Bernbaum (1977:59) highlights this difference between the new and the old sociology:

> In both kinds of sociology of education ... ideological elements are to be found. There is, however, an important difference. The old sociology of education contained, also, a committment on the part of its practitioners to the possibility of arriving at truth ... Within the new sociology of education and particularly the general sociological standpoints from which it develops, it is very difficult to make the distinction between 'ideology' and 'science'.

The new sociologists argued that different cultures have different criteria of truth and falsity, indeed different logics (Keddie 1973), and that, for example, positivist sociology simply represented a vehicle for the imposition of western, white, middle class values and beliefs on other groups. Since all knowledge, including that concerning truth criteria, is founded on fundamental

assumptions and political interests, the argument ran, it can only be judged in terms of the interests which motivate it or the functions which it serves. It was claimed that, given a commitment to human liberation (Young 1973), what is required in a society characterized by domination and alienation is to challenge the assumptions built into social institutions, including sociology itself. Only by the rejection of such assumptions, it was believed, could people take control of society rather than being dominated by it (Dawe 1970).

The new sociology of education was never a coherent and well-integrated set of ideas and it was not long before it began to split into competing approaches whose proponents became increasingly at odds with one another. The major division which arose was between those concerned with macro-theory and those engaged in micro-focused research on schools. But this was by no means the only division, further fragmentation occurred within both macro and micro camps. It was in this context that what I shall call the paradigmatic mentality, a set of attitudes to sociological work deriving from the paradigm argument, flourished. One aspect of this mentality concerns our attitudes to the ideas associated with other paradigms. At first sight it might be assumed that the paradigm argument would encourage tolerance. One of its implications is that disagreement among social scientists is inevitable, given the existence of multiple paradigms grounded in conflicting assumptions and interests. And since paradigms are valid in their own terms, it might be concluded that one should simply accept that others think

differently.

In practice, however, the paradigm argument encourages intolerance. This is most obviously true in the case of attitudes towards those who refuse to accept the paradigm argument itself, claiming that their knowledge at least approximates to the truth. They have felt the full brunt of attack, being accused, for example, of adopting 'a lofty pose of being above the battle'. Their views are dismissed as arrogant and empiricist. However, the paradigm argument has encouraged little tolerance even towards others who also accept it. Much as Weber argued that people could not tolerate the strain of trying to live their lives on the basis of strict Calvinist beliefs, so it seems that it is difficult to be a sociologist while yet accepting that any sociological view is as good as any other. From this perspective sociological work seems pointless. In practice, paradigm members tend to treat their own assumptions as true and to reject those of other paradigms as necessarily false. And, of course, given the paradigm argument, other paradigms cannot be subjected to rational criticism. Rather, they can only be dismissed, ~~out-right~~, on the grounds that they draw on assumptions different to those built into one's own paradigm.

There are many examples of this. For instance, in advocating a Weberian perspective, Ronald King writes as follows: ~~notes the 'interesting convergence' between Marxism and structural functional analysis, and comments:~~

> One of the forms of Marxism to be found in the recent sociology of education is the structuralist variety of Althusser and of Bowles and Gintis

> which draws upon the political economy of the 'mature' Marx (another of the emanationist theories dismissed by Weber). This shows an interesting convergence with the structural functional analysis of education ...
>
> Weber considered that rational actions were in the ascendency in the modern world, but, as Eldridge points out, Weber was referring to the subjective intentions of individuals directed to means regarded as correct for a given end. Classical Marxism proceeds by the application of its own (economic) rationality, and where the behaviour of people is at variance with their imputed 'true interests' they are suffering from false consciousness. Having carried out lengthy 'probing' interviews with three teachers and the headteacher of a primary school, Sharp and Green virtually dismiss their accounts of their actions (made, for the most part, at a high level of abstraction remote from classroom events) in pursuit of 'progressive' ideals, and, by the application of a Marxist perspective, conclude that such education contributes to the preservation of the existing social order. There is little to choose between being the cultural dope of functionalism or suffering from the false consciousness of Marxism.
>
> (King, 1980:10)

Here the argument against Marxism is two-pronged. Firstly, King points to its similarities with functionalism, trading on the ritual rejection of functionalism by members of other paradigms, including Marxists. The second element of the argument, hardly disputable though not as clear-cut as King suggests, is that Marx's mode of explanation is different from Weber's. But the question of which approach is correct, or most useful, is treated as self-evident; even though sophisticated arguments have been deployed on the other side (for example Lukes 1974).

np [In much the same manner, Sharp (1981) criticizes a long stream of authors in the sociology of education from Durkheim to Michael F.D. Young on the grounds that they do not conform to her interpretation of Marxism. She makes little attempt, however, to demonstrate that her perspective is the most fruitful one. That is an assumption from which she starts and which she expects her readers to accept on faith.

np [The effect of the paradigm argument, then, is to reduce us either to debilitating uncertainty about the justification for our work or to political and theoretical dogmatism. The paradigm argument not only divides sociological work up into different paradigms it also threatens the very possibility of rational debate among representatives of the different approaches. One simply must accept one or another set of assumptions about the nature of the social world as a matter of commitment or faith. Other paradigms can only be rejected on the grounds that they <u>are</u> other paradigms, though rhetorical force can be added to such rejections by explaining away alternative views in terms of interests or functions claimed to underly them. The concept of 'ideology' which has of course become very popular among sociologists of education in recent years is ideally suited to such a task (Hammersley 1981).

np [Much time is thus expended in fruitless polemic in which the concepts employed are progressively drained of cognitive meaning. The all-purpose insults 'positivist', 'empiricist' and 'liberal' are only the most obvious examples. We can get some sense of how empty such terms have become by comparing how they are used by representatives of different paradigms. Thus, Sharp (1982:50) claims that

> ... despite its self-concept as embodying a methodological procedure which overcomes the blindness of positivism with its empiricist fetishization of the 'objective' fact, ethnography's own method is equally empiricist. In place of 'the facts' as objectified in a computer printout, appear the facts of the raw data of consciousness, of the motivations, purposes and creative projects of active intending minds in interaction with other minds, and of events and happenings as these are subjectively constructed and mediated through everyday encounters and relationships. Ethnography follows a classic empiricist inductivist method: observable phenomena are recorded, ordered, and classified; this collating process gives rise to empirical generalizations and hypotheses. Evidence is then sought to further substantiate such empirical generalizations which are then used deductively in explanation to produce plausible interpretations.

From a very different perspective, that of ethnomethodology, Hitchcock (1983: 21) also charges ethnography with failing to break with positivism. He cites Rist's (1973:241) claim to have found 'an interlocking pattern of institutional arrangements descending from the macro-level of the city-wide school system ... to the various stratification techniques

employed by individual teachers in their classrooms' as an example. Yet he claims that Rist's approach is positivist precisely because the latter does not do what Sharp sees as characteristic of positivism:

> we are left in the dark about exactly how Rist was able to manage deductions about the relationships between phenomena at different levels, about how he came to his conclusions.

Here we have arguments about practical methodology dressed up as epistemological issues through loose talk of 'positivism' and 'empiricism'. This is a widespread phenomenon.[2]

np [Even where the arguments of each side address substantive issues, theories deriving from different paradigms are often regarded as mutually incompatible, on no strong evidence. For example, Collins (1972 and 1979) treats as competitors functionalist and conflict explanations for the increasing levels of qualifications demanded by North American employers, and seeks on the basis of inadequate evidence to demolish the former in order to make way for the latter. Yet the two theories are certainly not logically incompatible, and it may well be that each provides a partial explanation for the phenomenon with which Collins is concerned.

np [The defects of particular theories ~~as~~ of studies are often treated as symptons of the general worthlessness of the paradigm from which they ~~work~~ derive, rather than as an opportunity for further research. For example, on the grounds that some versions of structural functionalism have been less than convincing in their explanations for

social change, functionalism is often assumed to be incapable of explaining change and is dismissed as conservative. Similarly, because interactionists have sometimes neglected to investigate the material constraints which operate on actors, this is taken as conclusive evidence that interactionism is idealist and thus simply liberal ideology. Only rarely do the critics try to develop the theories they critize to discover whether the attributed faults are intrinsic or contingent; and thus whether they can be overcome. Generally, it is assumed that the theories are incapable of such development.[3]

np [Part and parcel of this is the assumption that political assumptions are logically tied to particular theoretical views and perhaps even to certain empirical claims about the world. For example, it is often assumed that interactionists necessarily view western societies as characterized by 'democratic pluralism' and that they look on this feature favourably. Conversely, both functionalism and 'deterministic' forms of Marxism are accused of failing 'to treat people seriously' and thus by implication of being linked to repressive forms of politics (Hargreaves 1978: 73).

np [Of course, the most common response to work in other paradigms which the paradigm argument induces is sheer neglect. Huge tracts of the sociological literature are ignored. One sign of this is that those

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who study the same area from the point of view of different paradigms draw on completely different literatures. Some years ago I had occasion to compare the indexes of two books appearing at the same time both dealing with what we might call 'rebellious youth': Willis's Learning to Labour and Marsh, Rosser and Harré's The Rules of Disorder. The entries listed in their indexes under 'A' and 'B' are by no means untypical:

accounts, 15, 17, 21–2, 117; *see also* football fans, schoolchildren: accounts
actions, social, 3, 14–17, 21–2, 25–6, 64, 118, 121, 131; rule-governed, 15, 18, 29, 121
acts, social, 15, 21, 25–6, 29, 121
aggression, 27–8, 128, 130; ritualized, 24, 26–8, 91, 125–8, 131, 133–4; social management, 97, 128–9, 131, 134
aggro, 118, 121, 125, 127–30, 133–4; definition, 28, 68n; leader, 68–70, 74, 77–9, 82, 97, 116; outfit, *see* dress
animals' behaviour, 127–8
Ardrey, Robert, 129n

Becker, Howard, 10–11
Bernstein, Basil, 6, 19
biological factors, 27–8, 109, 118, 129–30
Blackpool FC, 70
Bullshitters, 68–9, 124
Burrell, Joanna, 5

(Marsh, Rosser & Harré 1978)

Alienation 143
Althusser, L. 137, 183
Anderson, P. 170
Ashton, D. N. 141
Auld, R. 86
Autonomous work groups 179–183

Balibar, E. 137
Barthes, R. 115
Bennett, 193
Bourdieu, P. 128, 142
Braverman, H. 142, 180, 183
Brighton Labour Process Group 142

(Willis 1977)

Despite their similar focus these books show virtually no overlap in the references they cite. Each appeals to a quite different literature and probably, of course, to a quite different audience.[4]

np

Up to now I have considered the external relations of paradigms, how we deal with work which we take to represent other paradigms than our own. Equally damaging, though, are the attitudes which the paradigm argument encourages us to take towards the ideas which make up our own paradigm. Given that there is no rational basis in terms of which those ideas can be doubted, they have to be treated as true a priori. Moreover, this is reinforced by the effects of the foreign policies of paradigms. As already implied, these tend to reduce the audience for any piece of work to those who view it as deriving from their own paradigm. The result is that, as writers, not only are we rarely required to try to justify our paradigm assumptions, often we do not even have to think about them, they become second nature.

In any event, to question these assumptions is, of course, to threaten one's identity as a paradigm member and to open oneself up to the attributions of ulterior motive and ideology deployed against representatives of other paradigms. This comes out clearly in the following extract from a review of Willis's Learning to Labour by Michael Apple. Having pointed out that reproduction theory is 'a bit incorrect', Apple goes on to remark:

> Before my colleagues on the left grow uncomfortable, let me clarify what I mean. There is no lack of evidence to support the claim that schools act as agents in the economic and cultural reproduction of an unequal society. Nor is there any lack of

> evidence about the power of the hidden curriculum in schools in teaching norms and values to students that are related to this unequal society. What I mean to contest here is a particular assumption - that of passivity - one which tends to overlook the fact that both students and workers are creatively acting in ways which often contradict these expected norms and dispositions which pervade the school and workplace.
>
> (Apple 1979 ; 101-2)

Here Apple clearly finds it necessary to guard against the possibility that he might be thought to be casting doubt on the basic premises of the neo-Marxist paradigm. He hastily reassures his readers that 'there is no lack of evidence' for these, that he is only modifying one of the minor premises.[5]

The treatment of certain political and theoretical assumptions as articles of faith has a number of effects. One is the encouragement of speculation and the neglect of systematic checking of theories and facts. After pointing out the similarities between order and control theories of schooling, Edwards(1980: 67) notes their common weakness: 'the practice of constructing a description of how things "are" from a theoretical analysis of how things "must be" to maintain the social system, thereby avoiding the chore of observation'. And later (p 71) he notes that 'some of the bleakest accounts of schooling seem to follow the American Declaration of Independence in presenting their "truths" to be self-evident'.

np [Unlike King, Edwards does not claim, however, that this feature is intrinsic to these paradigms. And indeed in my view it stems rather from the paradigm argument in general, not from the ~~nature~~ content of particular paradigms. Evidence for this comes from the fact that, despite the frequent criticisms of interactionism as 'empiricist', this perspective rarely leads to the igorous assessment of empirical claims. While interactionist ethnographers show no reluctance to employ data, their treatment of this data is often highly speculative relying not on ~~checks of~~ systematic checking ~~often highly speculative relying not on checks~~ of interpretations but on a general appeal to be in touch with reality through naturalistic research methods (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). And those who most strongly insist upon the paradigmatic purity of interactionism often reject those few methodological procedures built into ethnography which are designed to test accounts, such as triangulation and analytic induction (Williams 1976).

np [As a result of the way in which the paradigm argument discourages empirical checks on theories, other criteria come to be used for choosing among theoretical ideas. Thus, for example, the assumed political implications of explanations may become an overriding consideration (Hargreaves, 1982). Giroux (1981:3) provides an example:

> In stressing the primacy of either the state or political economy in educational theory and practice, radical theories of reproduction have played a significant role in exposing the ideological assumptions and processes behind the rhetoric of neutrality and social

> mobility characteristic of both conservative and liberal views of schooling. Yet while such theories represent an important break from idealist and functionalist paradigms in educational theory, they still remain situated within a problematic that ultimately supports rather than challenges the logic of the existing order. The point here is that there are some serious deficiencies in existing theories of reproduction, the most important of which is the refusal to posit a form of critique that demonstrates the theoretical and practical importance of counter-hegemonic struggles both within and outside of the sphere of schooling.

The comprehensiveness of a theory is also sometimes given great weight. For example, it is sometimes claimed that a theory is superior if it can not only explain the phenomena under study, but also why others might adopt different explanations (Sharp, 1980). Within interactionism, the 'richness' of data, and the extent to which findings contradict conventional or official views, have come to be major criteria for judging ethnographic accounts.

In this section I have outlined what I see as the major features of the paradigmatic mentality. What I have presented is very much an ideal type. I am not claiming that this set of attitudes totally dominates the sociology of education. We are not all locked into membership of closed, self-interacting paradigms. Nevertheless I think the paradigm argument, in one form or another, has been extremely influential and that as a result the paradigmatic mentality has to a considerable extent become institutionalized in our intellectual and social relations. Moreover, in my view this has had a disastrous effect on the development of our discipline.

It is one of the major reasons why the sociology of education has shown very little cumulative development of knowledge over the last ten years or so, why we do not have a body of knowledge on which much reliance can be placed in formulating policy, either at the national or the classroom level. Not only does the paradigm argument undercut attempts to develop objective knowledge through the systematic development and testing of theory, the mentality to which it leads sabotages this process through secondary effects: for example the dismissal of much of the existing literature as worthless and the encouragement of speculation presented as fact.

One important consequence of our failure to 'produce the goods' is that it opens the sociology of education up to economic and political attack, as we have recently discovered. But the paradigmatic mentality leaves us vulnerable to such attacks in another way too. If we claim that our findings stem from the political and theoretical assumptions built into our paradigms, we can hardly plead innocence to charges of political bias. Nor can we legitimately complain when those holding different political commitments refuse to finance our work. Presumably, were the roles reversed, we would do the same. The costs of the paradigmatic mentality have been high, and they could rise still further.

Now, if the paradigm argument were valid, we might simply have to live with its consequences. Fortunately, there are good grounds for thinking that it is not. The paradigm argument is founded upon relativism, and relativism is logically incoherent. If it were true that the validity of all knowledge claims is relative, this would also apply to the argument for relativism itself. But this leads to the paradoxical conclusion that there are, after all, some knowledge claims which are not relative. In other words, relativism undercuts its own claim to truth:

> Truth, says the cultural relativist, is culture-bound. But if it were then he, within his own culture, ought to see his own culture-bound truth as absolute. He cannot proclaim cultural relativism without rising above it, and he cannot rise above it without giving it up.
>
> (Quine, 1975:327-8)[96]

Rejecting the paradigm argument as incoherent does not force us to deny that all knowledge is subject to value biases and that all facts are dependent on the validity of theories. But these are not the novel claims that they are often presented as being by proponents of the paradigm argument. Weber was perfectly well aware of the first when he argued for sociology to be value-neutral. He did not claim, as seems to be widely assumed, that one could produce sociological knowledge unaffected by values. Rather, he was arguing that we should try to minimize the effect of practical values (i.e. those other than the search for truth) on the execution of our research procedures (Keat and

Urry 1973 ch 9). By contrast, Gouldner (1973) simply implies that since knowledge can never be unaffected by values, there is no point in trying to control their effects. But this is to treat a matter of degree as if it were all or nothing. The implication is that all ideals should be abandoned since, by their very nature, they are unattainable.

np [As the Marxist historian Eugene Genovese (1968: 4) points out 'the inevitability of ideological bias does not free us from the responsibility to struggle for maximum objectivity'. Moreover, the justification he provides for this is very much the same as Weber's: objective knowledge aids principled and effective political action (Roth and Schluchter 1979):

> In fact what we (socialist historians) stand for is the realization that all historical writing and teaching - all cultural work - is unavoidably political intervention, but that ideologically motivated history is bad history and ultimately reactionary politics ... In each case the demand for ideological history for 'class truth', for 'partisanship in science', has ended in the service of ... a new oppressor.
>
> (Genovese 1968: 5-10)[67]

np [Moreover, if one looks at the relationships between political standpoints and theoretical assumptions, one finds that these are weak at best. For example, neither side of the argument about whether the education system is relatively autonomous from the economy is logically tied to any general political viewpoint. Its political implications depend critically upon how the economy is conceptualized. While relative autonomy has become a catchword for Marxists wishing to

avoid the political pessimism induced by direct reproduction theories (Hargreaves 1982), the latter need not be pessimistic from a socialist point of view nor does relative autonomy necessarily offer hope regarding effective socialist interventions. If the mode of production is regarded as itself shot through with contradictions and conflict, according to reproduction theory these would be reflected within the education system. Under these conditions relative autonomy would not be needed to allow for the possibility that workers in the education system might make political headway. Indeed, in this case relative autonomy might well diminish the effects of economic contradictions on schools, and thus reduce the possibility of significant educational change.

np

However, even in the absence of contradictions within the mode of production relative autonomy does not necessarily imply that 'radical' social change, in whatever direction, is easier or more likely than it would be if direct reproduction theories were correct. This is because while relative autonomy implies that change within the limits set by forces outside the education system is easier, the obverse of this is that any change lying beyond these limits is likely to be more difficult to bring about since it requires change in other relatively autonomous sectors. Whereas, in a tightly integrated system, change in one area tends to lead to change throughout, in a system where the parts enjoy relative autonomy, change in one sector may have

little effect elsewhere in the system. There is no longer a single point of leverage by which, given appropriate circumstances, social change can be brought about. The battle has to be fought on many different fronts each no doubt requiring very different strategies. The task of bringing about change may thus be more difficult in a system characterized by relative autonomy than in one in which direct reproduction obtains.

The paradigm argument leads us to neglect such possibilities - it hitches up sets of theoretical and political assumptions and presents them as though they necessarily belong together. Yet quite clearly they do not. Marxist theories are often functionalist (Cohen 1978; Giddens 1979), sometimes differing from structural functionalism in little more than the evaluations made of the processes described and explained. Equally, the Webe rian character of much recent Marxist theorizing has been noted (Hargreaves 1983) and there have even been claims that Marxism and interactionism share much in common (Goff 1980; West, this volume). Quite clearly, there is strong evidence against the claim that we have internally consistent and mutually exclusive paradigms in sociology.

The fallacy of treating matters of degree as though they were all or nothing alternatives also underlies the paradigm argument's treatment of the relationship between theory and evidence. It often seems to be assumed that because all facts are theory-dependent the empirical testing of theory is impossible. One simply has to take paradigmatic assumptions on trust:

> The theory-ladenness of investigation gives rise to a large number of methodological issues and problems, and it is hardly our purpose to discuss these here. On the other hand, it is our purpose to undertake an investigation, and this we shall do by, ~~following the~~ broad features of a methodological device outlined by ~~Imre Lakatos~~; that ~~is~~, by casting our investigation into the context of a research programme (or problematic) wherein certain basic or 'hard core' hypotheses and propositions are accepted as being secure and inviolable for the purpose of operating or working with the research programme.
>
> (Harris, 1983: 29)

But the theory-laden character of facts does not rule out their use in assessing the validity of theories, it simply means that such assessments can never be absolutely conclusive. Moreover, while there may be no 'pure facts' one can nevertheless range statements along a theoretical-empirical continuum (Kaplan, 1964; Newton-Smith, 1981; Quine, 1981).

We are not faced with a choice between naive empiricism on the one hand and the paradigm argument on the other. There have been many attempts by philosophers to resolve the epistemological issues which surround the relationship between theory and evidence. Their work no more suggests that the paradigm argument is the solution ~~that~~ than it recommends naive empiricism. Few philosophers have adopted either of these positions, and for good reasons.[78]

But the strongest argument of all against accepting the paradigm argument is that, like all forms of relativism, it denies the very possibility of knowledge. (Newton-Smith, 1981). Of course, it may be that our everyday experience of the world is wholly an illusion, but we have no way of judging that claim nor is it clear that it would make any

difference to our everyday judgements about what is and is not true if it were the case. Certainly, the fact that relativism undercuts claims to truth has not prevented those who use the paradigm argument from making strong claims about the world.

Conclusion

Even if the effects of the paradigm argument on the sociology of education have been damaging and it is also false, the question of what the alternative is remains to be answered. There have, of course, been many critics of paradigm divisions, and especially of that separating macro and micro research (Bernstein 1975; Banks 1978, Hargreaves 1978). The remedy recommended has often been that the paradigms be put together in some kind of synthesis.

In many ways this is an appealing idea. It seems to involve an even-handed approach in which the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective are recognized and treated as complementary. The paradigm argument is side-stepped through the construction of a single, all-embracing paradigm. This strategy combines the emotional satisfaction of visiting a plague on both houses with a more constructive process of reconciling differences and making peace.

However, in my view the search for synthesis is misdirected. In many ways it compounds the damaging effects of the paradigmatic mentality. Two or more sets of paradigm

assumptions about the nature of the social world are put together, but since these are of uncertain validity in the first place, combining them carries few advantages. Moreover, the task of formulating revisions to these assumptions to make them mutually consistent comes to consume all our energies, at the expense of efforts to develop and test theories. Comprehensiveness remains a key criterion in judging theoretical ideas and because the paradigm argument has not been directly challenged, attempts to produce empirically valid findings are still discouraged.

np [In trying to find a way out of this cul-de-sac, we can do worse than return to Kuhn. It is curious that one of the major sources of the paradigmatic mentality should have been a study of the natural sciences, given that another influential source was the rejection of these as a model by such theoretical traditions as interpretive sociology and Critical Theory. But it seems clear that despite his protestations to the contrary, Kuhn's account of the incommensurability of paradigms does lapse into relativism. And his conception of 'paradigm' is notoriously vague and contradictory. Still, most of his account of science can be preserved while rejecting relativism (Masterman 1970; Newton-Smith 1981). Furthermore, the core meaning of 'paradigm' has become much clearer in his responses to critics than it was in the first edition of The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Kuhn 1968; 1970a and 1970b). Of course, even in that first edition

~~back~~ Kuhn made clear his view that the social sciences were pre-paradigmatic, ~~but~~ This becomes even more obvious once the root meaning of 'paradigm' is identified as an exemplar: a particular study or set of studies which establishes the importance of a problem and demonstrates how that problem, and others like it, can be effectively solved. (Barnes 1982).

np [One aspect of this conception of paradigm which it is particularly important to note is that it treats the sciences as organized principally around research problems and <u>not</u> around conflicting world-views. Ironically, the pre-paradigmatic character of sociology (in Kuhn's terms) may stem in large part from the fact that it has typically been organized around paradigms (in the sense of conflicting political philosophies).

np [The paradigmatic mentality represents an unhealthy exaggeration of traits to be found in normal science. Our knowledge is always founded upon assumptions and open to the influence of our values. As a result it is never absolutely certain. But we should not draw the conclusion from this that any 'knowledge' is as valid as any other, and that prior commitment is the only basis on which selection among theories can be made. The fact that we can never attain absolute certainty in the sociology of education does not mean that we cannot come to rational conclusions about the validity of our descriptions and theories on the basis of empirical evidence. And indeed, unless we are prepared to

accept defeat, to call what we do 'social studies' rather than 'social science', and to look for work elsewhere, we must reject the paradigm argument. Quine (1978: 34) neatly sums up the alternative I am recommending:

> We make do with what we have and improve it when we see how. We are always talking within our going system when we attribute truth; we cannot talk otherwise. Our system changes, yes. When it does, we do not say that truth changes with it; we say that we had wrongly supposed something true and have learned better. Fallibilism is the watchword, not relativism.

NOTES

1 This claim is rarely presented in clear form, for obvious reasons. Thus, for example, in the extract from Harris (1979) quoted earlier he retains the possibility that whether theories discover or produce the real world might be used as a criterion for choosing between them. Yet in his attack on empiricism and his adoption of Althusser's distinction between theoretic and real objects he undercuts any possibility of making claims about the world.

2 Particularly instructive as regards Sharp's critique of empiricism is Hudelson's (1982) cogent argument that Marx himself was an empiricist.

3 There is evidence of this in my own work. See for example. Hammersley 1980 and Hammersley and Turner 1980

4 For an account of external relations among paradigms in another area of sociology which identifies a similar range of attitudes see Bradley and Wilkie, 1980.

5 In fact the evidence he cites is very meagre. For the most part it consists of other studies expressing a commitment to but providing little empirical support for reproduction theory.

6 For further discussion of relativism, see Trigg 1973; Meiland and Krausz, 1982; Hollis and Lukes, 1982. Mackinnon, 1976 assess the relativistic arguments of the new sociology of education.

7 Mackinnon, 1977 and Keat, 1981 provide useful discussions of the fact-value issue.

8 One of the most persuasive treatments of the problem is that of Charles Peirce (Reilly, 1970, Rescher, 1978 and Almeder, 1980). ~~See also Newton-Smith, 1981.~~

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